The Jester and the Sage: Twain and Nietzsche

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In early July 1906 Mark Twain's secretary, Isabel Lyon, was advised by a friend to read Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85). A week later, on 13 July, Lyon exclaimed in her diary, "'Zarathustra' has arrived!" She was immediately taken with the book. "Here I am," she reported the next day, "reading 'Thus spoke Zarathustra' and I do not pretend to be qualified to say how wonderful I find it." Her enthusiasm seems to have spread throughout the household. A month later, on 8 August, Lyon records: "the King [her nickname for Mark Twain] wanted to see my Zarathustra. It pained me to give him up, but I did it. And after the King had looked through it he said, 'Oh damn Nietzsche! He couldn't write a lucid sentence to save his soul.'" Lyon goes on, "Somehow I am glad he doesn't like Zarathustra. Very, very glad—but I shall be able to quote some passages to him—some telling passages—for Nietzsche is too much like himself."[1]

Twain's initial response to Nietzsche, it seems clear, was like Sigmund Freud's: a retreat from familiarity prompted by the

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[1] Isabel Lyon, Diary. Mark Twain Papers. University of California, Berkeley. We are grateful to David and Jocelyn Hoy of the University of California, Santa Cruz for timely guidance on key philosophical issues.

glimpse of a spirit "too much like himself" for comfort.[2] A kindred ambivalence surfaced two days later, as Lyon records in her diary: "The King says, 'Damn Nietzsche' when I offer a quotation for the King's approval. First he damns—but then he approves with his head on one side in his quaint listening attitude." Lyon continued for several months to plumb the depth of the analogy between the two writers, and by early autumn fell to praising her employer for his defiance of the "criminal" Christian God, "the one who made man so that he has to sin and can't help himself." "Like Nietzsche," she continues, Twain's "cry was not one of weak pity for the human, but of fierce condemnation for the creator of the devils that war within the human breast."[3] Nor, quite evidently—and quite despite his gruff dismissals—was the humorist unmindful of his kinship with the infamous German. In an autobiographical dictation on 4 September 1907 Twain declares that he has not read Nietzsche, but he acknowledges at the same time a certain familiarity and sympathy with the German's ideas: "Nietzsche published his book and was at once pronounced crazy by the world—by a world which included tens of thousands of bright, sane men who believed exactly as Nietzsche believed but concealed the fact and scoffed at Nietzsche."[4]

While it is perfectly clear that Mark Twain was aware of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, there is no evidence that he more than glanced at the book or that its author was a direct influence in any of his writings. Twain's philosophical ideas had pretty much jelled by the time Isabel Lyon brought Nietzsche to his attention. Her acute perception of a likeness between the two writers was undoubtedly triggered by her familiarity with *What Is Man?*, the Socratic dialogue and "Gospel of Self" that Twain

[2] In 1931 Freud wrote: "I have rejected the study of Nietzsche although—no, because—it was plain that I would find insights in him very similar to psychoanalytic ones" (Sigmund Freud, letter to Lothar Bickel, 28 June 1931, quoted in Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* [New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1988], p. 46n [Gay's translation]).

[3] Isabel Lyon, Diary, 10 August and 12 October 1906. Mark Twain Papers. On 27 August Lyon reports: "This morning I said to the King, 'Nietzsche says—' 'Oh, damn Nietzsche'. 'But Mr. Clemens, Nietzsche calls the acts of God, "divine kicks."' 'Hurrah for Nietzsche!' the King shouted, and slapped his leg hard."

[4] Mark Twain, autobiographical dictation, 4 September 1907. Mark Twain Papers.

was preparing for publication in the spring of 1906. *What Is Man?* gives voice to ideas that had been smoldering for decades, and that Twain felt compelled to write down and preserve for posterity. But because the book was relentless in its exposure of human selfishness, he elected to issue it in a small and anonymous edition for private circulation. Isabel Lyon, who helped with the proofreading, was an enthusiastic admirer of the subversive sentiments on display in *What Is Man?*. It is "so absorbingly interesting," she wrote in her diary, "that once you begin a galley, you can't stop until you've read all the batch. And Mr. Clemens does like it so much! It is his pet book."[5] It is a reasonable surmise, then, that Lyon's enthusiasm for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which she received just a few weeks later, was fueled by its perceived intellectual kinship with her employer's defiant little tract.

Others have followed Lyon in glimpsing an affinity between Twain and Nietzsche. Carl Dolmetsch finds no evidence of direct influence, but observes nonetheless that Nietzsche's ideas were "commonplaces" of the "European intellectual milieu" that Twain entered during his 1897–99 residence in Vienna, when he first set to work on *What Is Man?*.[6] Jennifer L. Zaccara is equally measured in what she describes as Twain's "acceptance of a Nietzschean worldview." It is a virtual certainty, she argues, that the American would have become aware of Nietzsche's nihilism during his stay in Vienna. She is quick to add, however: "It is fair to say Mark Twain came to a nihilistic vision on his own, . . . and that he nurtured this dark view of the world over the years" before the Austrian sojourn.[7] We concur entirely with Zaccara that Twain's intellectual debt to Nietzsche was small, involving little more than confirmation of an enduring trend. At the same time, however, we have found that the similarities between the thought of the two writers are closer

[5] Isabel Lyon, Diary, 24 May 1906. Mark Twain Papers.

[6] See Dolmetsch, *"Our Famous Guest": Mark Twain in Vienna* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1992), p. 228.

[7] Jennifer L. Zaccara, "Mark Twain, Isabel Lyon, and the 'Talking Cure': Negotiating Nostalgia and Nihilism in the *Autobiography*," in *Constructing Mark Twain: New Directions in Scholarship*, ed. Laura E. Skandera Trombley and Michael J. Kiskis (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2001), pp. 120, 115.

and much more numerous than scholars have recognized. The link that Isabel Lyon glimpsed in 1906, and that Dolmetsch and Zaccara briefly elaborate, is one matching element among many others in the separate but parallel ideas of Nietzsche and Twain on the human condition. Indeed, we suspect that had the two writers met and compared views, they would have experienced a stunning shock of recognition.[8]

Though scholars have assigned Nietzsche's work to philosophy and Mark Twain's to literature, both writers were brilliant psychologists with a common and compelling interest in the submerged wellsprings of human behavior. Both were maverick moralists given to immoralist masquerades. Both shared Freud's interest in the unconscious, his inclination to trace modern discontent to the tyranny of suppressed or unacknowledged psychic phenomena, and his generally dark prognosis for civilization at the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, both were at times disposed to view the world as a madhouse. "The earth," Nietzsche exclaims in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), "has been a lunatic asylum for too long."[9] Twain's Satan takes the same view, writing back to Hell of the earth: "This is a strange place, an extraordinary place, and interesting. There is nothing resembling it at home. The people are all insane."[10] But even as they condemned the modern world, both writers tended to exempt humans from responsibility for their condition. The belief in free will, they agreed, was as groundless as the unseen engines of behavior were real. Nietzsche was persuaded of what he described as "man's complete lack of responsibility for his behavior and for his nature,"[11] while Twain never

[8] Nietzsche was also well aware of Mark Twain. For example, in 1879 he offered to send his friend Franz Overbeck a copy of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). See Friedrich Nietzsche, letter to Franz Overbeck, 14 November 1879, quoted in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954, 1968), p. 73.

[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals: An Attack*, in his *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1956), p. 227.

[10] Mark Twain, "Letters from the Earth" (1909), rpt. in his *What Is Man? and Other Philosophical Writings*, ed. Paul Baender, vol. 19 of *The Works of Mark Twain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1973), p. 405.

[11] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (1878), I, 107; quoted and trans. in Philippa Foot, "Nietzsche's Immoralism," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morals,"* ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1994), p. 10.

wearied of blaming God or temperament or circumstance for human degradation. "Why do you reproach yourself?" asks Mark Twain's Satan in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* (1916); "You did not make yourself; how then are you to blame?"[12] The writers were alike, then, in mingling contempt for humans with a belief in their essential innocence.

The madness of the world was most broadly manifest for Nietzsche and Twain in hegemonic Christian civilization. "I can think of no development that has had a more pernicious effect upon the health of the race," the German declares, than the Christian ascetic ideal; "It may be called, without exaggeration, the supreme disaster in the history of European man's health" (*Genealogy of Morals*, p. 280). For his part, Mark Twain took the view that there had never been "a stupider religion" than Christianity;[13] that in time "it will be recognised that all the competent killers are Christian";[14] and that modern Christendom might best be imagined as "a majestic matron, in flowing robes drenched with blood. On her head, a golden crown of thorns; impaled on its spines, the bleeding heads of patriots who died for their countries—Boers, Boxers, Filipinos; . . . Protruding from [her] pocket, [a] bottle labeled 'We bring you the Blessings of Civilization.' Necklace—handcuffs and a burglar's jimmy."[15] Though his indictment was broader than Nietzsche's, Twain certainly shared the philosopher's view that Christian civilization was most lethal in its infliction of psychological suffering on individual believers. He returned to this point on numerous occasions, but nowhere more memorably than in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, where Satan inveighs against

> a God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; . . . who gave his

[12] Mark Twain, *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* (1916), in *Mark Twain's Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts*, ed. William M. Gibson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 250.

[13] Mark Twain, autobiographical dictation, 22 June 1906. Mark Twain Papers.

[14] Mark Twain, "The Chronicle of Young Satan" (written 1897–1900), in *Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts*, p. 137.

[15] Mark Twain, "The Stupendous Procession" (written 1901), in *Mark Twain's Fables of Man*, ed. John S. Tuckey, Kenneth M. Sanderson, and Bernard L. Stein (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1972), p. 405.

> angels painless lives, yet cursed his other children with biting miseries and maladies of mind and body; who mouths justice, and invented hell—mouths mercy, and invented hell—mouths Golden Rules, and forgiveness multiplied by seventy times seven, and invented hell; . . . who created man without invitation, then tries to shuffle the responsibility for man's acts upon man, instead of honorably placing it where it belongs, upon himself; and finally, with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor abused slave to worship him!
>
> (*No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, pp. 404–5)

Nietzsche traces the malaise of modernity back to the ancient origins of what he describes as "slave morality." He explains: "All truly noble morality grows out of triumphant self-affirmation. Slave ethics, on the other hand, begins by saying *no* to an 'outside,' an 'other,' a non-self, and that *no* is its creative act" (*Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 170–71). Such *ressentiment*, closely linked for Nietzsche with Christianity, arose historically out of the hatred of the weak for the strong, of the slave for the master. But because their survival necessitated the repression of the craving for power and revenge, the weak internalized their aggressive instincts. The result was an intensification of consciousness, and with it the development of a punishing conscience. Having turned his desire for outward revenge inward upon himself, the now "guilt-ridden man seized upon religion in order to exacerbate his self-torment to the utmost" (*Genealogy of Morals*, p. 226). To the very considerable extent that the slave morality achieved hegemony in the Christian West, revenge upon the masters, now themselves humbled and disciplined by the new dispensation, was achieved. But the victory, earned at the price of surrender to "the most terrible sickness that has wasted man thus far," was of course no victory at all. Driven by furtive resentment of all that is noble and free, and inwardly tormented by remorseless guilt, humankind was in thrall to a parched, punishing regime. Nietzsche protests: "What a mad, unhappy animal is man!" (*Genealogy of Morals*, p. 226).[16]

[16] We are indebted here to Jörg Salaquarda, "Nietzsche and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 90–118.

For Nietzsche it is perhaps the most painful irony of all that humans are innocent of the terrible guilt unleashed upon them by their proud but utterly groundless morality of good and evil. In *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) he declares: "My demand upon the philosopher is known, that he take his stand *beyond* good and evil and leave the illusion of moral judgment *beneath* himself."[17] Where there is no possibility of wrong there can be no real guilt, only its crippling illusion; Nietzsche insists that "the bite of conscience, like the bite of a dog into a stone, is a stupidity."[18] The historical assault on the free outward play of instinct was for Nietzsche the commencement of all of our mortal woe. He argues: "Every naturalism in morality—that is, every healthy morality—is dominated by an instinct of life. . . . *Anti-natural* morality—that is, almost every morality which has so far been taught, revered, and preached—turns, conversely, *against* the instincts of life" (*Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 489–90). More directly and succinctly still, he claimed that "all that is good is instinct—and hence easy, necessary, free" (p. 494).

Who that has read Mark Twain's most famous novel can fail to be reminded here of Huck's words at the end of chapter 18, when he has escaped the murderous, moralizing Christian civilization along the shore and rejoined his friend Jim on the raft in the middle of the wide Mississippi? "We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft."[19] The fugitive boy's feelings directly reflect those of his maker, who enjoyed drifting down great rivers precisely because of the peace of mind—and most especially the freedom from nagging guilt—brought on by the journey. Ten days of rafting on the Rhône in 1891, Twain wrote to his friend Joseph Twichell, left his "conscience in a state of coma, and lazy comfort, and solid happiness. In fact there's

[17] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer* (1889), in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 501.

[18] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (1880), in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 68.

[19] Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), ed. Victor Fischer and Lin Salamo, with Walter Blair, vol. 8 of *The Works of Mark Twain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2003), p. 155.

nothing that's so lovely."[20] A kindred sentiment surfaces to view in the title of Twain's unpublished manuscript *The Innocents Adrift*, a section of which was posthumously published in 1923 in *Europe and Elsewhere*. "To glide down the stream in an open boat, moved by the current only," and thereby to experience a "strange absence of the sense of sin, and the stranger absence of the desire to commit it,"[21] was for Mark Twain the height of attainable mortal bliss.

But of course neither the writer nor his most famous protagonist were able to avoid the shore and the inevitable anguish awaiting them there. Huck's subsequent "adventures" present constant and baffling challenges to his sense of right and wrong. At one crucial juncture, when his instinctive loyalty to Jim draws him into conflict with conventional values, Huck rounds toward a Nietzschean perspective on morality: "Well, then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right, when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p. 127). Despite his bold resolve, Huck underestimates the subtle and tenacious authority of the moral scheme in which he is entangled. In time, however, when complete disenchantment finally sets in, he decides to sever all ties with Christian civilization: "I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest," he reflects, "because aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p. 362).

Mark Twain and Huck are closely akin to Nietzsche in their approval of instinct, of all that is easy, natural, and free, and in their corresponding impatience with Christian civilization and its irrational tyranny of conscience. During his long, varied, and often tumultuous life, guilt was the humorist's special curse. "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut" (1876), in which Twain claims to have murdered his

[20] Mark Twain, letter to Joseph H. Twichell, 1 October 1891, in *Mark Twain's Letters*, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917), II, 558.

[21] Mark Twain, "Down the Rhône" (1891), in his *Europe and Elsewhere* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923), pp. 129, 139.

odious conscience, makes comedy of what was in fact a permanent blight on his spirit. Albert Bigelow Paine observes: "Remorse was always [his] surest punishment. To his last days on earth he never outgrew its pangs."[22] The moral burden was compounded by Twain's perverse habit of blaming himself on occasions when others were the victims of suffering for which he had no direct responsibility. Years after her father's death, Clara Clemens paused to comment on this dominant strain in his makeup. She observed: "If on any occasion he could manage to trace the cause of some one's mishap to something he himself had done or said, no one could persuade him he was mistaken. Self-condemnation was the natural turn for his mind to take, yet often he accused himself of having inflicted pain or trouble when the true cause was far removed from himself."[23] Twain's moral anguish takes clear if oblique expression in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), where Hank Morgan muses: "If I had the remaking of man, he wouldn't have any conscience. It is one of the most disagreeable things connected with a person; and although it certainly does do a great deal of good, it cannot be said to pay, in the long run; it would be much better to have less good and more comfort."[24]

Like Nietzsche, Mark Twain was increasingly persuaded of both the groundlessness and the destructiveness of the conventional Christian distinction between good and evil. During the last decade or so of his life, Twain's views coalesced in a bitter attack on what he called "the Moral Sense." Satan, the "hero" of Twain's *Mysterious Stranger* writings, speaks quite clearly and directly for Twain in excoriating humanity as a

> "paltry race—always lying, always claiming virtues which it hasn't got. . . . Inspired by that mongrel Moral Sense of his! A Sense whose function is to distinguish between right and wrong, with liberty to choose which of them he will do. Now what advantage

[22] Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, a Biography: The Personal and Literary Life of Samuel Langhorne Clemens*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1912), I, 65.

[23] Clara Clemens, *My Father, Mark Twain* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), pp. 6–7.

[24] Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, ed. Bernard L. Stein, vol. 9 of *The Works of Mark Twain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1979), pp. 209–10.

> can he get out of that? He is always choosing, and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong. There shouldn't *be* any wrong; and without the Moral Sense there *couldn't* be any. And yet he is such an unreasonable creature that he is not able to perceive that the Moral Sense degrades him to the bottom layer of animated beings and is a shameful possession."
>
> ("Chronicle of Young Satan," pp. 72–73)[25]

Here, then, is Mark Twain's version of Nietzsche's slave morality. The distinction between good and evil is without foundation, and those who proudly make choices based upon it are the contemptible victims of a delusion that enslaves them to the darkness in themselves and to the tyranny of conscience. True, Mark Twain set forth no genealogy of moral decline from past freedom to present bondage; rather, he was inclined to characterize human nature as unchanging in its perverse tilt toward iniquity. Hopelessly alienated from the blissful freedom of their instinctive lives, humans surrender all too readily to the destructive allure of the Moral Sense. "'Civilization *is* Repression,'" Miss Lyon protested to her diary in 1905, reporting on a conversation with her famous employer; "you have to jam down out of sight the action of the strongest laws of your being and the great cry of truth."[26] Nietzsche, the passionate advocate of what he regarded as a natural, healthy morality that was firmly grounded in the instinct of life, could hardly have disagreed. Indeed, he would have gone further still, to insist that "man, with his need for self-torture, . . . invented bad conscience in order to hurt himself" (*Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 225–26). Twain advances the identical view in "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," where his sadistic conscience declares: "It is my *business*—and my joy—to make you repent of *every*thing you do."[27]

Nietzsche and Twain were also at one in the belief that contemporary Christian civilization, ensnared in an unnatural

[25] See also Mark Twain, "Man's Place in the Animal World" (1896), in *What Is Man?* p. 86: "Since the Moral Sense has but the one office, the one capacity—to enable man to do wrong—it is plainly without value to him."

[26] Isabel Lyon, Diary, 23 September 1905. Mark Twain Papers.

[27] Mark Twain, "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," in his *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays, 1852–1890*, ed. Louis J. Budd (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1992), p. 654.

morality enforced by predatory conscience, required for its creation and maintenance a culture based on fear and immersed in lies. Again, Twain's analysis is comparatively scattered and unsystematic, giving scant attention, for example, to Nietzsche's pivotal notion of *ressentiment*. But the writers were nonetheless in agreement on key essentials. In 1880 Nietzsche noted: "The refinement of morality increases together with the refinement of fear. Today the fear of disagreeable feelings in other people is almost the strongest of our own disagreeable feelings."[28] Mark Twain was equally impressed both with the human craving for self-approval and with the resulting fear of disapproval from others, which in combination form a virtually irresistible drive toward conformity. Such is the unequivocal message of much of Twain's late writing, most directly expressed perhaps in "Corn-Pone Opinions" (1901), which takes as its text the sage declaration of a young slave: "You tell me whar a man gits his corn-pone, en I'll tell you what his 'pinions is." Twain observes: "Broadly speaking, there are none but corn-pone opinions. And broadly speaking, Corn-Pone stands for Self-Approval. Self-approval is acquired mainly from the approval of other people. The result is Conformity."[29]

But of course, conformity to a slave morality could be achieved only at the price of widespread individual and collective surrender to varieties of evasion, disavowal, deceit, and self-deception—to a culture, in short, of lies. Nietzsche's "contempt for evasive falsification," observes Philippa Foot, was "one of the strongest things in him" ("Nietzsche's Immoralism," p. 4). Nietzsche's feelings found their focus in the devious dynamics of *ressentiment*, the "art of simulation" that "reaches its peak" in the bitter struggle of the slave majority against the noble master class:

> here deception, flattery, lying and cheating, talking behind the back, posing, living in borrowed splendor, being masked, the disguise of convention, acting a role before others and before oneself—in short, the constant fluttering around the single flame of

[28] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Notes (1880–81)," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 75.

[29] Mark Twain, "Corn-Pone Opinions," in his *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays, 1891–1910*, ed. Louis J. Budd (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1992), pp. 507, 510.

> vanity is so much the rule and the law that almost nothing is more incomprehensible than how an honest and pure urge for truth could make its appearance among men.[30]

In a civilization given over almost entirely to slavish *ressentiment*, Nietzsche bitterly complained, "to be truthful means using the customary metaphors—in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all" ("On Truth and Lie," p. 47).

Mark Twain took a strikingly similar view of both the vast domain and cultural dynamics of deception. Indeed, we cannot too much emphasize the importance of the lie in the work of both writers, who perhaps shared nothing so much as the sense that humankind is in permanent retreat from a true reckoning with its own reality. In one of the maxims from *Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar*, which Twain uses as chapter epigraphs for his *Following the Equator* (1897), he writes: "There are those who scoff at the schoolboy, calling him frivolous and shallow. Yet it was the schoolboy who said 'Faith is believing what you know ain't so.'"[31] In the same vein, Nietzsche observes: "'Faith' means not *wanting* to know what is true."[32] In the view of Twain's Satan, the human "race lived a life of continuous and uninterrupted self-deception" ("Chronicle of Young Satan," p. 164).

In Twain's work more generally, as in Nietzsche's, pervasive deceit is invariably bound up with moral evasion. As illustration we need look no further than *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1900), and *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*. But Twain is most direct and emphatic on this issue in two essays devoted specifically to the subject of lying. In the first, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," which he presented at a club in Hartford in 1882, he ruminates briefly and archly on the axiom: "Lying is universal—we *all* do it; we all *must* do it. Therefore,

[30] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" (written 1873), in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 43.

[31] Mark Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey around the World* (1897), rpt. in *Following the Equator and Anti-imperialist Essays* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), p. 132.

[32] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* (1895), in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 635.

the wise thing is for us diligently to train ourselves to lie thoughtfully, judiciously."[33] In "My First Lie and How I Got Out of It," published nearly twenty years later in 1899, his tone is much more sober and deliberate. Once again, Twain states unequivocally that "all people are liars from the cradle onward, without exception." Deceitfulness is the very essence of human nature, and it is so by virtue of an "eternal law." Since man "didn't invent the law," he is not responsible for its effects; "it is merely his business to obey it and keep still." This act of concealment, this master lie about the universal sway of deceitfulness, he goes on, is "the lie of silent assertion; we can tell it without saying a word, and we all do it."[34]

The silent acquiescence in known deceit is integral to what we have elsewhere defined as "bad faith," the reciprocal deception of self and other in the denial of departures from leading public values.[35] Bad faith as it appears in Twain's work bears the clear implication that humans will sometimes permit what they cannot approve so long as their complicity is submerged in a larger, tacit consensus. For Nietzsche a person in thrall to *ressentiment* "is neither truthful nor ingenuous nor honest and forthright with himself" (*Genealogy of Morals*, p. 172). Such a person will cling to Christian faith, which for the philosopher involves "*having no choice but to lie*" (*The Antichrist*, p. 635). For Nietzsche the lie involves "wishing *not* to see something that one does see; wishing not to see something *as* one sees it. . . . The most common lie is that with which one lies to oneself" (*The Antichrist*, p. 640). In similar fashion, Mark Twain views epidemic self-deception as a leading symptom of the disease of modern Christian civilization. In "My First Lie and How I Got Out of It" he observes of the "lie of silent assertion": "In the magnitude of its territorial spread it is one of the most majestic lies that the civilizations make it their sacred and anxious care to guard and watch and propagate." The silence in fact speaks volumes about

[33] Mark Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," in *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays, 1852–1890*, pp. 828–29.

[34] Mark Twain, "My First Lie and How I Got Out of It," in *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays, 1891–1910*, pp. 439–40.

[35] See Forrest G. Robinson, *In Bad Faith: The Dynamics of Deception in Mark Twain's America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986).

the ubiquitous influence of the Moral Sense, the perverse human gravitation to evil, and the subsequent bad-faith denial of complicity in gross injustice. Twain continues:

> It would not be possible for a humane and intelligent person to invent a rational excuse for slavery; yet you will remember that in the early days of the emancipation agitation in the North the agitators got but small help or countenance from any one. Argue and plead and pray as they might, they could not break the universal stillness that reigned, from pulpit and press all the way down to the bottom of society—the clammy stillness created and maintained by the lie of silent assertion—the silent assertion that there wasn't anything going on in which humane and intelligent people were interested. ("My First Lie," p. 440)

We are witness to a species of the same mute moral evasiveness, Twain adds, in the response to the Dreyfus case in France and in the refusal among many in England to acknowledge the injustice of the Boer War (1899–1902) in South Africa. He concludes: "The silent colossal National Lie . . . is the support and confederate of all the tyrannies and shams and inequalities and unfairnesses that afflict the peoples" of the world ("My First Lie," p. 446).

Nietzsche and Twain are thus at one on many important issues. They agree on the madness of modern Christian civilization; they agree as well that the disease has its wellspring in the displacement of healthy human instinct by a groundless and pathological moral culture of good and evil—a culture feeding on fear, fostering massive and oppressive guilt, and dependent for its maintenance on the proliferation of lies. To be sure, their ideas on these matters do not overlap in all details. As we shall see, Twain knew something of *ressentiment*, but it was not as central or as developed in his thinking as it was in Nietzsche's. And though both writers emphasize the role of lies in modern life, Nietzsche highlights the self-deception requisite to faith in the dominant moral system itself, while Twain is equally attentive to bad-faith evasions of the injustices suffered by the victims of civilization. Despite these differences, however, the parallels in the thought of these maverick contemporaries are numerous and remarkably close.

We have not yet exhausted the fertile ground for comparison of Nietzsche and Twain. The striking intersection of ideas at the core of their analysis of modern civilization forms a kind of center from which an array of cognate perspectives may be seen to arise. Because they were sharply attentive to the contradictions in human experience, both writers gravitated to aphorisms—brief, pithy, paradoxical utterances often featuring unanticipated turnings and juxtapositions. In *The Wanderer and His Shadow* Nietzsche wrote: "The greatest giver of alms is cowardice" (p. 70). And in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he warned: "Beware of the good and the just! They like to crucify those who invent their own virtue for themselves."[36] Similarly, Twain, through his *Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar* maxims, declared: "There are several good protections against temptations, but the surest is cowardice"; and "The principal difference between a cat and a lie is that the cat has only nine lives" (*Following the Equator*, pp. 324, 622).

Like Nietzsche, Twain was a pioneer of modern prose characterized by abrupt transitions, discontinuity, and fragmentation. For both, contradiction and paradox, everywhere manifest in conventional morality, were the inevitable offspring of faith in a nonexistent God. Hardly immune to contradiction themselves, both alternated between contempt for their kind and a forgiving sense of human innocence. Both regarded the idea of free will as an illusion;[37] both strongly inclined to determinism.[38]

[36] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (1883–85), in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 176.

[37] Keith Ansell-Pearson writes: "Nietzsche holds, in fact, the radical view that notions of free will, of the subject and the 'soul,' are fictions which have been invented by weak and oppressed human groups" in order to "hold the strong responsible for their actions and make them feel guilty about their strength (you are evil to be strong) and, at the same time, [to] glorify their own lack of strength as a condition of inner freedom" (Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker* [New York: Cambridge Univ. Press. 1994], p. 18). So construed, free will is integral to *ressentiment*.

[38] In "What Is Man?" (1906) Twain wrote: "Man the machine—man, the impersonal engine. Whatsoever a man is, is due to his *make*, and to the *influences* brought to bear upon it by his heredities, his habitat, his associations" (Mark Twain, "What Is Man?" in *What Is Man?* p. 128). According to Brian Leiter, Nietzsche held the closely related view that "human beings lack free will, and are determined to do what they do, and believe what they believe, by largely *natural* facts about their physiology and their psychological drives" (Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* [New York: Routledge, 2002], pp. 71–72).

Neither put much faith in democracy, established judicial systems, or the idea of human equality. They agreed on the role of the unconscious in human motivation and shared a belief in the analytical significance of dreams.[39] Both recognized a potent, often unintentional autobiographical impulse in their writing. "Yes," Twain acknowledged in 1886, "the truth is, my books are simply autobiographies";[40] Nietzsche described his work as a "the confession of its originator, and a species of involuntary and unconscious auto-biography."[41] Both yearned after the imagined bliss of life in earlier, less "civilized" circumstances, and both acknowledged a powerful craving for oblivion. Neither believed that most humans would choose to live their lives over again.[42]

While it could hardly be argued that our principals were animated by a sanguine surplus, there are nonetheless several overlapping strands of optimism in their thought. Both men prescribed laughter as a cure for the spiritual ailments of the modern world. Nietzsche's Zarathustra advises: "Not by wrath does one kill but by laughter. Come, let us kill the spirit of gravity!" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 153). And again: "Laughter I have pronounced holy; you higher men, *learn* to laugh!" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 407–8). Twain's Satan offers virtually the same advice. The human race, he insists, "has unquestionably one really effective weapon—laughter. Power, Money, Persuasion, Supplication, Persecution—these can lift at a colossal humbug,—push it a little—crowd it a little—weaken it a little, century by century: but only Laughter can blow it to rags and

[39] See Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 226–27; Foot, "Nietzsche's Immoralism," p. 10; and Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Notebook*, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), pp. 348–52.

[40] Mark Twain, letter to Miss Kate Staples, 8 October 1886. Mark Twain Papers.

[41] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Helen Zimmern (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), p. 10.

[42] Many Nietzsche scholars interpret the doctrine of eternal recurrence as an implicit posing of the question whether life is worth repeating. See Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins, "Nietzsche's Works and Their Themes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, pp. 37–38. Twain's response to the question was perfectly unequivocal: "there has never been an intelligent person of the age of sixty who would consent to live his life over again" ("Letters from the Earth," p. 428).

atoms at a blast. Against the assault of Laughter nothing can stand" ("Chronicle of Young Satan," pp. 165–66).

The two writers were also at one in affirming that humans have the potential, little recognized or developed, to create and to re-create themselves and their world. Nietzsche writes: "When the Christian crusaders in the East happened upon the invincible Society of Assassins, . . . they must have got some hint of the slogan reserved for the highest ranks, which ran, 'Nothing is true; everything is permitted.' Here we have real freedom, for the notion of truth itself has been disposed of" (*Genealogy of Morals*, p. 287). During a long, tumultuous career, Twain made intellectual gestures along similar lines, and may be said to have embodied the self- and world-creating spirit that Nietzsche celebrates. But it was not until the last, often dark years of his life that the humorist fully articulated his own version of ultimate human freedom. Once again, Twain spoke through Satan, who exults: "My mind *creates!* . . . Creates anything it desires—and in a moment" ("Chronicle of Young Satan," p. 114). The doctrine takes an even more radical turn at the very end of *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, where Satan declares: "*Nothing* exists; all is a dream. . . . *Nothing exists save empty space—and you!*" God, good and evil, the terrible burden of guilt—"these things are all impossible," he insists, "except in a dream." Satan is careful to highlight the liberating significance of his message—"I your poor servant have revealed you to yourself and set you free"—and adds that the key to contentment in solitary, infinite space is simply to "Dream other dreams, and better!" (*No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, pp. 404–5).

Our writers were also strikingly at one in their esteem for animals, children, and selected warriors and aristocrats, whom they regarded as exemplary of the honesty and freedom wanting in most adults. Nietzsche's Zarathustra argues: "The creation of freedom for oneself for new creation—that is within the power of the lion. The creation of freedom for oneself and a sacred 'No' even to duty—for that, my brothers, the lion is needed." But strength for resistance is itself not enough, he continues, which is why "the preying lion [must] still become a child." For "the child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred

'Yes'" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 139). Here is humanity freed from the corrupting accretions of history and civilization, fresh and joyous in its instinctive embrace of a brave new world. Robert C. Solomon describes Nietzsche as "a misanthrope who translated his disgust with humanity as he found it into an inspiring portrait of humanity (or superhumanity) as it once was and again may be." This idealized figure, Solomon adds, is possessed of a "master morality" that "is not only good but in some sense more natural, healthier, and truer to our ideal nature(s)" than the slave morality that has displaced it.[43]

Animals and children living outside the dark circle of good and evil, and therefore free agents of the master morality, have their direct counterparts for Nietzsche in warriors and aristocrats equally removed in spirit from modern decadence. He observes:

> Among the noble, mental acuteness always tends slightly to suggest luxury and overrefinement. The fact is that with them it is much less important than is the perfect functioning of the ruling, unconscious instincts or even a certain temerity to follow sudden impulses, court danger, or indulge spurts of violent rage, love, worship, gratitude, or vengeance. . . . It is a sign of strong, rich temperaments that they cannot for long take seriously their enemies, their misfortunes, their *misdeeds*.
>
> (*Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 172–73)

The master morality flourishes among those whose limited and undeveloped intellects scarcely influence or impede a natural impetuosity at once robust and heedless of consequences. Because "such characters have in them an excess of plastic curative power, and also a power of oblivion" (*Genealogy of Morals*, p. 173), they are free in a mindless sort of way to follow the promptings of instinct unencumbered by artificial considerations of right and wrong. Warriors, Nietzsche believed, were supremely gifted with this highest form of moral and physical health. He boldly declares: "The human being who has *become free* . . . spits on the contemptible type of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers,

[43] Robert C. Solomon, "One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment*: Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, p. 99.

Christians, cows, females, Englishmen, and other democrats. The free man is a *warrior*" (*Twilight of the Idols*, p. 542).

Mark Twain entertained an array of strikingly similar ideas, though with him they were characteristically more moderate and unsystematic. Like Nietzsche, he looked upon the childhood of mankind as an age comparable in its blissful freedom and moral perfection to that enjoyed by animals. In an 1898 draft he declares: "Adam was perfect before he got the Moral Sense, imperfect as soon as he got it. In the one case he *couldn't* do wrong, in the other he could. Adam fell; the other animals have not fallen. By the supreme verdict of God they are *morally perfect*."[44] It is little wonder, in this light, that Twain looked back on his own early days with such aching nostalgia. He wrote in 1900 to the widow of his old friend, Will Bowen, that once childhood had passed, "life is a drudge, & indeed a sham. A sham, & likewise a failure. . . . I should greatly like to re-live my youth, & then get drowned. I should like to call back Will Bowen & John Garth & the others, & live the life, & be as we were, & make holiday until 15, then all drown together."[45] It is little wonder as well that, when they play, Twain's fictional boys make violent war and indulge in "orgies," all with unreflecting, animal indifference to adult moral consequence.

The aristocrats and warriors that Hank Morgan encounters in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* are themselves childlike in the free, impulsive play of their instincts and in their immunity to guilt. Hank Morgan reflects: "they were a childlike and innocent lot. . . . It was hard to associate them with anything cruel or dreadful; and yet they dealt in tales of blood and suffering with a guileless relish that made me almost forget to shudder" (*A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 66). King Arthur is so completely and unself-consciously the noble warrior that he is unable to simulate the outward bearing of a slave, even when his life depends upon it. Hank insists to the king:

> "Your soldierly stride, your lordly port—these will not do. You stand too straight, your looks are too high, too confident. The

[44] Mark Twain, supplement to "The Moral Sense," in *What Is Man?* p. 474. See also "Letters from the Earth," pp. 403–4.

[45] Mark Twain, letter to "Mrs. Bowen," 6 June 1900. Mark Twain Papers.

> cares of a kingdom do not stoop the shoulders, they do not droop the chin, they do not depress the high level of the eye-glance, they do not put doubt and fear in the heart and hang out the signs of them in slouching body and unsure step. It is the sordid cares of the lowly born that do these things."
>
> (*A Connecticut Yankee*, p. 320)

The king is admirable in Hank's eyes (as we must imagine he was in Twain's) because his rather dim, unreflecting self-assurance renders him invulnerable to the oppressive doubts that weigh on those cursed with more active minds. Hank accords the king the same respect that Twain's Satan shows for animals. In "The Chronicle of Young Satan" Satan angrily rejects the use of the word "brutal" to describe human cruelty, insisting: "You should not insult the brutes by such a misuse of that word. . . . No brute ever does a cruel thing—that is the monopoly of the snob with the Moral Sense. When a brute inflicts pain he does it innocently. . . . And he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it—only man does that" ("Chronicle of Young Satan," p. 72).

Viewed from this perspective, Twain's hero-worship of Ulysses S. Grant and Joan of Arc makes especially good sense. In Twain's eyes, the general and the maid were moral paragons whose childlike innocence was directly linked to their extraordinary military prowess. Both were instinctive warriors whose valor and stoicism arose unreflectingly from the simple integrity of their natures. In an 1885 letter Twain observes admiringly: "Grant was no namby-pamby fool, he was a *man*—all over—rounded and complete." But Grant was this way precisely because he was also an innocent who expressed himself "with a frankness and a child-like naïvety."[46] Elsewhere in that same year Twain referred to Grant as "the most simple-hearted of all men."[47] Like Grant, Joan is for Twain the composite of all noble virtue; she is truthful and steadfast and of dauntless courage. In *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896) Twain

[46] Mark Twain, letter to Henry Ward Beecher, 11 September 1885, in *Mark Twain's Letters*, II, 460.

[47] Mark Twain, "About General Grant's 'Memoirs'"(1885), in *Mark Twain's Autobiography*, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine, 2 vols. (New York: P. F. Collier and Son Co., 1925), I, 38.

writes that Joan's military genius is entirely natural—"born in her," we are assured—and she fights with "an intuition which could not err." In battle she is relentless: "it is storm! storm! storm! and still storm! storm! storm! and forever storm! storm! storm! hunt the enemy to his hole, then turn her French hurricanes loose and carry him by storm!"[48] And yet at the core of Joan's fierce martial instinct is unblemished innocence and simplicity. She is "that wonderful child"; she is "perfectly frank and childlike"; she engages others in a manner that is "fresh and free, sincere and honest, and unmarred by timorous self-watching and constraint" (*Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, pp. 461, 123).

Odd as it may seem, Mark Twain's Satan is cut from some of the same cloth as the heroic American general and the warlike French maid. Speaking of creatures of his divine make, Satan declares: "We cannot do wrong; neither have we any disposition to do it, for we do not know what it is" ("Chronicle of Young Satan," p. 49). His military might and moral innocence are simultaneously on display when he effortlessly destroys a castle and its five hundred occupants, an exploit that the narrator says leaves Satan "full of bubbling spirits, and as gay as if this were a wedding instead of a fiendish massacre" ("Chronicle of Young Satan," p. 52). In another fragment from the *Mysterious Stranger* manuscripts, Twain describes Satan as noble and aristocratic in all things: charming, resourceful, radiant with health and vigor, self-confident, and "surpassingly handsome—handsome beyond imagination!"[49] But above all else, Satan's radical innocence exempts him from the sway of conventional morality, thereby freeing him to follow his instincts beyond good and evil, wherever they may lead. In *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* Satan proudly insists: "*We* have no morals; the angels have none; morals are for the impure; we have no principles, those chains are for men. . . . We wear no chains, we cannot abide them; we have no home, no prison, the universe is our province; we do

[48] Mark Twain, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 235, 230.

[49] Mark Twain, "Schoolhouse Hill" (written 1898), in *Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts*, p. 176.

not know time, we do not know space—we live, and love, and labor, and enjoy, fifty years in an hour, while you are sleeping" (*No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, p. 370).

The potent innocence shared by Grant, Joan, and Satan is uncommon by any standard, not least of all perhaps because none of the three is distinguished by what we may think of as intellectual virtue. None of them is at all thoughtful or reflective; none displays the slightest tendency toward ratiocination. This is of course because they are actors, not thinkers; so comprehensive is their innocence, their transcendence of all considerations of good and evil, that they are free—as animals are free—of the necessity to engage in moral reflection. Thus with them there is no gap between thought and deed, between instinctive impulse and action. This divorce of rational deliberation from true moral freedom is for Nietzsche and Twain the manifestation of a more general distrust of the human intellect. For both writers conscious thought is not only in thrall to the tyranny of deceit and self-deception at large in modern civilization, but also in league with it. The mind is home not to a mechanically precise Enlightenment calculator, but rather to a ragged throng of competing impulses, most of them weak, selfish, and prone to all manner of deceit and self-deception. Behaving thoughtfully was for our paired writers the furthest thing from behaving naturally or truthfully or well. Nietzsche declares:

> The development of consciousness, the "spirit," is for us nothing less than the symptom of the relative imperfection of the organism; it means trying, groping, blundering—an exertion which uses up an unnecessary amount of nervous energy. We deny that anything can be done perfectly as long as it is still done consciously. (*The Antichrist*, p. 581)

The historical emergence of human reflective power was simultaneous, in the philosopher's view, with the onset of bad conscience and *ressentiment*, when, for the first time, members of the species "were forced to think, deduce, calculate, weigh cause and effect—unhappy people, reduced to their weakest,

most fallible organ, their consciousness!" (*Genealogy of Morals*, p. 217).

We need look no further than *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to find answering sentiments in the work of Mark Twain. Huck is morally and emotionally on firm ground so long as he yields to the promptings of his heart. Almost invariably, however, when he pauses to reflect on his relationship with Jim, Huck's instinctive sense of justice is clouded by the encroaching racial perversities of his culture. At such moments the innocent, unreflecting child is overtaken by the corrupting consciousness of an adult. "Can a beast do wrong?" Twain asks in an unpublished fragment for *What Is Man?* Comes the reply: "No; for it is without consciousness."[50] In another fragment he observes: "Morally and in all other details but one—intellect—man is away below the other animals. God does not value intellect."[51]

The shared suspicion of human consciousness, like so many kindred points of comparison between Nietzsche and Twain, is widely on display—sometimes directly, sometimes more obliquely—in the work of both writers. It is precisely because the "evidence" is so widely broadcast that our survey of the striking similarities between the philosopher and the humorist has been rather dispersed and piecemeal: narrower, more detailed attention to individual works would have failed to suggest the true latitude of common ground. We hasten to add, however, that it is possible to examine many of the key correspondences between Nietzsche and Twain in a few, well-selected writings. Indeed, in Nietzsche's case, one book, *The Genealogy of Morals*—a seminal work on knowledge, morality, conscience, *ressentiment*, and human nature generally—will serve very well as a basis for comparative study. On Twain's side, the most relevant works are the late *What Is Man?*, a Socratic dialogue on human nature, and *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, an unfinished philosophical novel. "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," the essays on lying,

[50] Mark Twain, "[Draft of The Moral Sense]" (1897?), in *What Is Man?* p. 469.
[51] Mark Twain, "The Quality of Man" (1898), in *What Is Man?* p. 475.

and such social writings as "Corn-Pone Opinions," "The United States of Lyncherdom" (1901), and "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (1901) are also germane, as they speak to the discontents of modern civilization. Among Mark Twain's major fictions, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* are of undoubted interest, though none perhaps is more Nietzschean in its social and psychological analysis than *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), a novel that dramatizes the complex interplay between childhood innocence and adult "bad faith" in everyday life on the American frontier.

The hero of the story, young Tom, is a gifted leader who succeeds where most adults fail because of his intuitive, unself-conscious mastery and manipulation of the psychological forces—fear, envy, and bad conscience prominent among them—at large beneath the surface of life in his community. Tom, who lies without guilt, rushes headlong into imagined battles without fear, and triumphs over Injun Joe, the embodied village nightmare, enjoys youthful immunity to the moral malaise that afflicts his neighbors. In his intuitive social command, heroic sang-froid, and unshakable self-confidence, Tom is a boyish exemplar of the Nietzschean master morality. He is a "born leader" who never doubts his right or his ability to take charge, and who never fails. He succeeds because he follows his instincts and heeds the rules only when it is convenient to do so. "He would be President, yet," his neighbors predict, "if he escaped hanging."[52]

Tom's principal adversary, his half-brother, Sid, is even more clearly at home in the Nietzschean moral universe. Sid is a quiet boy; he is socially inept, but secretly ambitious for distinction. It follows almost inevitably that he is bitterly jealous of his handsome, outgoing, extravagantly resourceful sibling, who achieves without apparent effort all that Sid craves but can never call his own. Sid is driven by the compulsive resistance to an envied "other" that Nietzsche describes as the defining

[52] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, ed. John C. Gerber, Paul Baender, and Terry Firkins, vol. 4 of *The Works of Mark Twain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1980), p. 173.

characteristic of "slave ethics." True to type, Sid is utterly, perversely dependent on Tom; his only action is reaction to what he hates. He spies on Tom and "tattles" to their Aunt Polly; he is a resolute kill-joy, and contrives whenever possible to subvert his rival's grand schemes; he lies awake at night listening for damaging revelations in his sleeping half-brother's disjointed mutterings. He is a consummate embodiment in literature of *ressentiment*, the hallmark feature of Nietzsche's moral psychology. Indeed, nothing in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* describes Sid nearly so well as these words from Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals*: "His soul squints; his mind loves hide-outs, secret paths, and back doors; everything that is hidden seems to him his own world, his security, his comfort; he is expert in silence, in long memory, [and] in waiting" (*Genealogy of Morals*, p. 172).

As their lives wore on, Nietzsche and Twain grew increasingly emphatic in their dissent from the reigning optimism about progress and civilization. Both lost their faith in language and truth and the stability of human identity, and both, in turn, paid a heavy price for their defiance of the comforting certitudes shared by the majority gathered along the cultural mainstream. Their writings became more edgy and private, even obscure; much went unpublished. Their interior lives were equally unsettled: both suffered alienation from family and friends; both endured isolation and loneliness; both knew something of madness; and both craved oblivion. We are moved by the spectacle of such misery to fantasize a meeting between these aging twins of genius. We like to imagine that they would have been quick to identify each other as kindred spirits, and that understanding and warm trust would have issued from their genial shock of recognition. A happy fiction! In fact, of course, for Nietzsche as for Twain, the only real relief for what ailed them lay on the other side of the grave.

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ABSTRACT

Gabriel Noah Brahm and Forrest G. Robinson, "The Jester and the Sage: Twain and Nietzsche" (pp. 137–162)

Though Mark Twain and Friedrich Nietzsche were aware of each other, they never met and there is no evidence of influence in either direction. Yet the similarities in their thought are strikingly numerous and close. They were both penetrating psychologists who shared Sigmund Freud's interest in the unconscious and his misgiving about the future of civilization. Both regarded Christianity as a leading symptom of the world's madness, manifest in a slavish morality of good and evil and in a widespread subjection to irrational guilt. They were at one in lamenting the pervasive human surrender to varieties of evasion, disavowal, deceit, and self-deception. Other, lesser similarities abound in thought, style, and patterns of literary production.